

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 2744

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 678

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, US

SUBJ: ASSOCIATED PRESS DIFFICULTIES IN DAMASCUS

1. AP STRINGER LOUIS FARES CALLED ME FEB 24 TO SEEK
MY INTERVENTION WITH MININFO AHMAD ISKANDER AHMAD CON-
CERNING NONRENEWAL OF HIS PRESS CREDENTIALS BY
SARG. FARES STATES THAT DIFFICULTIES STEM FROM
STORIES FILED BY AP LUDINGTON OF BEIRUT IN MID-JANUARY
WHICH LED TO FARES ARREST ALONG WITH LUDINGTON.
FARES IS CERTAIN HE FARES, RETAINS MININFO'S PERSONAL RESPECT
AND FRIENDSHIP.

2. ACCORDING FARES LUDINGTON HAS DECIDED GIVE SYRIANS
UNTIL END OF FEBRUARY TO ISSUE NEW CREDENTIALS, WHICH
OTHER STRINGERS HAVE REPORTEDLY RECEIVED IN LATE
JANUARY. AS OF MARCH 1 AP WILL DECIDE WHETHER TO TRANSFER
FARES TO ANOTHER COUNTRY AS AN AP STAFFER AND COVER SYRIA
FROM OTHER CAPITALS AS WAS DONE BETWEEN 1967 AND 1973.
FARES NOTED, HOWEVER, HE ALSO SERVES AS STRINGER FOR
NEW YORK TIMES AND TIME MAGAZINE AND THAT, IF CHALLENGED
BY SYRIAN SECURITY OFFICIALS FOR HIS PRESS PASS TODAY,
HE WOULD BE UNABLE PRODUCE VALID SARG DOCUMENT FOR ANY
OF THESE ORGANIZATIONS.

3. SAID I WOULD BE HAPPY TO RAISE QUESTION WITH MININFO.
I CAUTIONED FARES, HOWEVER, THAT EMBASSY INTERVENTION
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MIGHT BE A LESS EFFECTIVE WAY TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM THAN

ENLISTING HIS SYRIAN CONTACTS. FARES REPLIED THAT HE HAS BECOME VICTIM OF POWER JOCKEYING BETWEEN DEPUTY MINISTER OF DEFENSE NAJI JAMIL AND MININFO AND THAT HIS SYRIAN CONTACTS ARE RELUCTANT TO GET INVOLVED. (PROTECT FARES AS SOURCE THIS COMMENT).

4. THEN SAID I WOULD FEEL IN STRONGER POSITION RAISE THIS MATTER WITH MININFO IF I HAD CONFIRMATION FROM AP THAT ITS FORWARD PLANNING IS AS FARES DESCRIBED IT (PARA 2 ABOVE) SINCE I WOULD BE RAISING QUESTION ON BEHALF OF AN AMERICAN ORGANIZATION. THIS WOULD FOCUS LESS ON FARES' PERSONAL STATUS ALTHOUGH THAT WOULD INEVITABLY COME UP IN DISCUSSION. FARES AGREED AND ASKED I NOT RAISE QUESTION WITH MININFO IN ANY EVENT PRIOR END OF FEBRUARY.

5. IN MEANTIME REQUEST EMBASSY BEIRUT CONTACT LUDINGTON, WHO I UNDERSTAND IS NOW BUREAU CHIEF, EXPLAINING MY VIEWS ON INTERVENTION AND REQUESTING HIS COMMENTS. I EXPECT SESSION WITH MININFO IN COURSE OF NEXT FEW DAYS TO DISCUSS HOW TO IMPROVE CONTACTS WITH TOP SARG OFFICIALS FOR ALL VISITING AMERICAN JOURNALISTS.

MURPHY

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